

Dover tolls may be made fully automated

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DOVER — High technology may result in the transfer of some toll-takers from the Denny's Road Toll Plaza to Boyd's Corner or other locations.

According to the Delaware Department of Transportation, the toll plaza at the north Dover facility may be a little more automated in the near future as DelDOT relies more and more on EZ-Pass and a bill changer.

"We are deciding whether to test this bill-changing system as part of a streamlining process to make our operations more efficient," said Michael Williams, DelDOT spokesman.

"Automation is being looked at as a possibility, but complete automation is by no means a certainty. In any event, it is not like auto plants where robotics are taking the place of humans on the assembly line. We would shift our personnel to other locations to make our shifts more evenly balanced."

The E-ZPass system, installed in a multi-state consortium of Delaware, New Jersey and New York, is an electronic toll device that electronically deducts money from an account set up through a centralized payment center.

It has been hailed as the newest innovation in toll collection and is said to result in speeding traffic that builds at toll plazas in heavily congested areas, particularly at rush hour or on holidays.

E-ZPass systems are also planned for the Pennsylvania Turnpike, the Massachusetts Turnpike, the Maryland Transportation Authority and the Delaware River Port Authority.

Delaware residents who subscribe can use the pass any loca-

tion on the system.

While E-ZPass is portrayed as high-tech, it is also suffering some growing pains. These have included subscribers being ticketed for toll evasion violations when the electronic device fails to record their vehicles going through the system.

According to design, a motorist slows to a pre-set speed, usually 5 to 15 mph, as they approach the toll booth at which the E-ZPass system is installed. Sensors detect the number of axles on your vehicle.

Next, the automatic vehicle identification antenna reads the account information from the E-ZPass sensor device and verifies account information, including current toll balances, and charges the subscriber's account.

As drivers proceed through the plaza, the patron display will indicate for the vehicle to proceed. If the prepaid account balance is not enough to pay the toll or a driver fails to stop to pay it, a photograph will be taken of the vehicle and license tag and a violation notice will be issued.

The photos are amazingly clear, showing not only the license tag, but the make and model of vehicles going through the plaza.

Some minor problems with the system are still being worked out, but recently there has been an increase in the number of complaints from drivers of certain vehicles, according to Mr. Williams.



Ron Betts holds up a banner for Lt. Gov. Ruth Ann Minner for the opening of the E-ZPass system in April. File photo

Other problems have developed because subscribers try to switch their electronic metering device to another vehicle, which may be incompatible.

Mr. Williams said individual devices can be ordered for each vehicle and that potential violations are easily corrected. Violations are not posted on an offender's driver's license record, he said.

"On the back of any violation notice, there is space to contest it," Mr. Williams said. "If the complaint is valid, it is almost always taken care of promptly."

During the first four months of the E-ZPass operation in Delaware there were more than 197,600 transactions, according to DelDOT records. No information is available on the number of violations.